

[P. 27, EX. 7]

עַל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר

עַל

The preposition עַל has a broad semantic range; Koehler-Baumgartner's lexicon, for example, lists at least 24 glosses. The context of our present phrase (Joel 3:1 [2:28]) tells us that "on (or, upon)," which is one of the more common meanings of עַל, is appropriate here.

כָּל

כָּל (here spelled כָּל) means "all."

MORPHOLOGY

כָּל is often pointed with Qamets Hatuf instead of Holem (i.e., כָּל). This is the case whenever this word is attached to the word which follows it by a Maqqef.

Remember that words joined together by a Maqqef are treated as one accentual unit, the primary accent of which falls on the last word of the unit. In our present text, then,

עַל-כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר constitutes one accentual unit. The accent lies on (the second syllable of) the last word, בֶּשֶׂר.

כָּל (a closed accented syllable) loses its primary accent when it is joined to בֶּשֶׂר with a Maqqef. כָּל- is a closed unaccented syllable; this kind of syllable must always take a short vowel, and so the Holem (*long* o-vowel) of כָּל shortens to Qamets Hatuf (*short* o-vowel), yielding כָּל-.

עַל too (normally a closed accented syllable), because it is connected to כָּל-בֶּשֶׂר with a Maqqef, has lost its primary accent. עַל is now therefore a closed unaccented syllable, but its vowel (Pathach) does not shorten because it is already short.

בֶּשֶׂר

The noun בֶּשֶׂר in certain instances may be translated “flesh,” and sometimes this is how it is translated in Joel 3:1 (Eng. 2:28). Is such a rendering appropriate here, however?

To help answer this question, let’s look at how some translations have dealt with this verse.

Numerous English versions (e.g., KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, ESV) have translated בָּשָׂר in Joel 3:1 as “flesh.” It is interesting that the NASB, which tends to be a more “literal” translation than many others, has rendered בָּשָׂר “mankind” in this verse. The NIV, which translates with more dynamic equivalence than many translations, renders בָּשָׂר here as “people.”

TRANSLATION

When translating, keep your audience in mind. To speak of people as “flesh” may make sense at certain times and in certain cultures, but it may not in others.

Final Translation

on all flesh

or

on all people

or

on all mankind